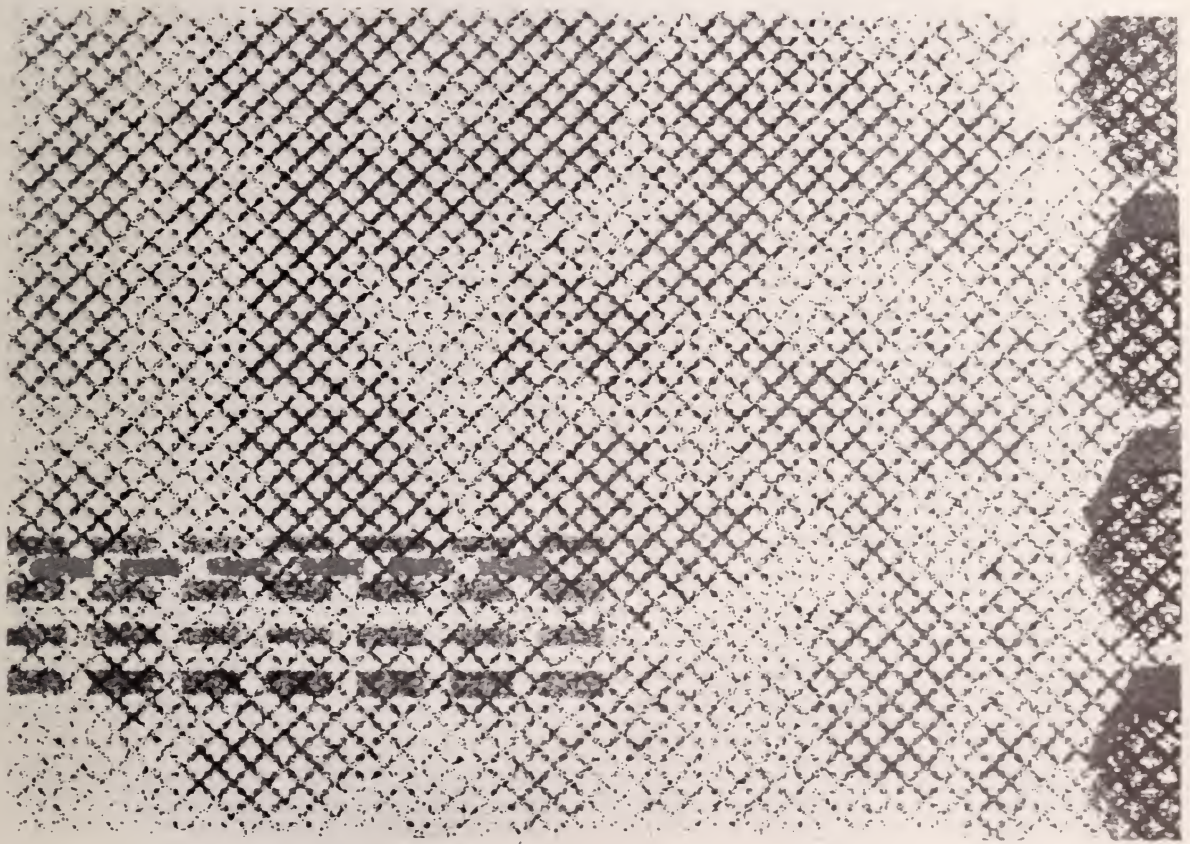


Tony Robbin



My aim is to draw on the vast array of stylistic elements already isolated and embodied in various traditions of painting—perspective space, cubist space, frontal space, reversible space, optical mix of color, texture and pattern. Each of my paintings alludes to several various painting traditions; each has multiple spatial illusions and abrupt, though hopefully satisfying, juxtapositions of colors, textures and patterns. No doubt predisposed to such an approach by formative years spent in diverse cultures—the Far East, the Middle East and Europe—I am compelled to build in myself an eclectic awareness and a tolerance of discontinuity, and to express these in painting which is malleable, complicated and protean.

Tony Robbin



Tony Robbin's eclectic, intense and contradictory paintings are a kind of visual echo chamber, a self-contained space in which dissident elements fluctuate, compete, infringe upon each other and situate themselves within it in a continuous dialectic.

Robbin's paintings are forcefully architectonic; within the planar surface of the canvas he builds discontinuous arenas that are forced, by proximity, into dialogue with each other. Transparent, overlapping planes, for instance, become part of a cubic space, reverse themselves and return to their original configuration as one looks at them. As in architectural space, the planes, volumes and implied masses in Robbin's paintings must be read differently, depending upon what part of the configuration one is looking at.

The three-dimensional world that Robbin builds from contradictory visual information suggests the complexity of four-dimensional geometry, in which projective figures exist for a specific period of time as well as within a specific space. There is no way of seeing a single painting, or even a form within a single painting, at once since every formal element in the work—line, texture, pattern, color, shape, size—is both dependent upon and in conflict with every other element.

Robbin's iconography of screened, repetitive shapes—grids, diamonds, hexagons, wavelike forms and calligraphic linear modules—is reiterated throughout each painting, and throughout the work as a whole. These elements are super-

imposed or juxtaposed against each other within an elongated horizontal format; a part of each painting generally consists of an oblique perspective space which creates a single integral illusionary vista, existing in sharp contrast to the multiple, densely textured areas which constitute the rest of the painting.

Robbin manipulates optical conflicts to a point of maximum tension. Where the textural planes are most translucent, his color is dense and saturated; where his forms suggest massiveness and solidity, they are often described by pale, delicately webbed lines; his most convincing spatial illusions are, at close view, achieved by a physically aggressive, tactile pigmentation.

The paintings pose formal problems, offer solutions, then deny their solutions by posing new problems; they are at once didactic and intuitive, conceptual and richly decorative, ordered and disjunctive. In Robbin's work, as in our lives, seeing is a matter of choosing *what* to see. Each painting is a window onto a world in which the establishment of visual order is for the viewer a matter of continuous choice, each alternative providing a unique kind of knowledge and unique visual delights.

Marcia Tucker

Curator, Painting and Sculpture

Tony Robbin's untitled drawings are not models or sketches for specific paintings, although a series of them may serve as tests for a future painting—opportunities to explore, almost playfully, such elements as optical mix, pattern and juxtaposed planes. Here the geometric and perspective elements of the paintings are left aside as Robbin indulges his aim to create what he calls a “continuous space,” that is, an ambiguous interplay of objects, planes and patterns, within which no single point of view is dominant. (An ever-present border, however, does provide for the viewer the traditional “window into space” and an orientation in relation to the picture plane.) More sensual, less intellectual than the paintings, the drawings are dense accretions of the muted hues preferred by the artist, employing the same technique of overlaying stenciled screen patterns as in the paintings; here again he manipulates quasi-heraldic motifs retained from his childhood experiences of Far and Middle Eastern and European art.

Freed of the grand architectural and spatial concerns of the paintings, Robbin turns out the drawings at great speed. Representing a release from the rigorous planning required by the highly structured paintings, they are for him a kind of “motion picture.” They rush from the floodgate of his imagination, endless variations on the theme of juxtaposition of pattern and color.

Elke M. Solomon

Associate Curator, Prints and Drawings

Tony Robbin

1943 Born November 24 in Washington, D.C.

Education

1961-65 Columbia College, Columbia University, BA.

1965-68 School of Art and Architecture, Yale University, BFA and MFA.

Teaching Experience

1967-68 Assistant in Instruction for Color Course, Yale University.

1968-69 Instructor, Silvermine College of Art, Silvermine, Connecticut.

1969-71 Instructor, University of New Haven, Connecticut.

1971-

present Assistant Professor, Trenton State College, New Jersey.

1974 Visiting Professor, City College of New York, CUNY.

Selected Group Exhibitions

1971 Bykert Gallery, New York.

1972 470 Parker Street Gallery, Boston.
Paley and Lowe Gallery, New York.
"1972 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Painting," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
The New Gallery, Cleveland.
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

1973 Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia.
Webb and Parsons Gallery, Bedford, New York.

Auction for Nicaragua, Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York.

"1973 Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

1974 "Painting and Sculpture Today," Indianapolis Museum of Art, and The Taft Museum, Cincinnati.

Articles by the Artist

"Smithson's Non-Site Sights," *Art News*, February 1969, pp. 50-53.

"Images: Two Ocean Projects at the MOMA," *Arts*, November 1969, pp. 24-25.

"Peter Hutchinson's Ecological Art," *Art International*, February 1970, pp. 52-54, 55.

"A Protean Sensibility," *Arts*, May 1971, pp. 28-30.

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Collection of the artist.